

Legislative

UPDATE

2007 Update to the 15th Legislative District

What the Legislature
accomplished this
session!

- Legislature approves *risky* spending plan
- Helping agricultural industry to thrive
- *Major* changes in children's education
- Building safe communities



Sen. Jim Honeyford



Rep. Bruce Chandler



Rep. Dan Newhouse

May 2007

Dear Friends,

The 2007 legislative session adjourned April 22, as scheduled. During our 105 days at the Capitol the Senate and House passed nearly 540 pieces of legislation.

The session's highest priority was to adopt new state budgets to fund government agencies and programs, construction projects and transportation projects. Our priorities were to adopt a sustainable and responsible operating budget while also focusing on the agricultural and public safety issues that are so important to our area.

This newsletter provides a look at how these important issues and other priorities fared this session.

The success of our state lies with the individuals and families who live and work in our communities. We will continue to support legislation that helps make our communities healthy and safe.

As always, we welcome your thoughts and ideas, questions and concerns, so don't hesitate to call, write or email us. Hearing from you helps us to better represent you.

Thank you for the honor and privilege of serving you.

Sincerely,



Sen. Jim Honeyford



Rep. Bruce Chandler



Rep. Dan Newhouse



15th District



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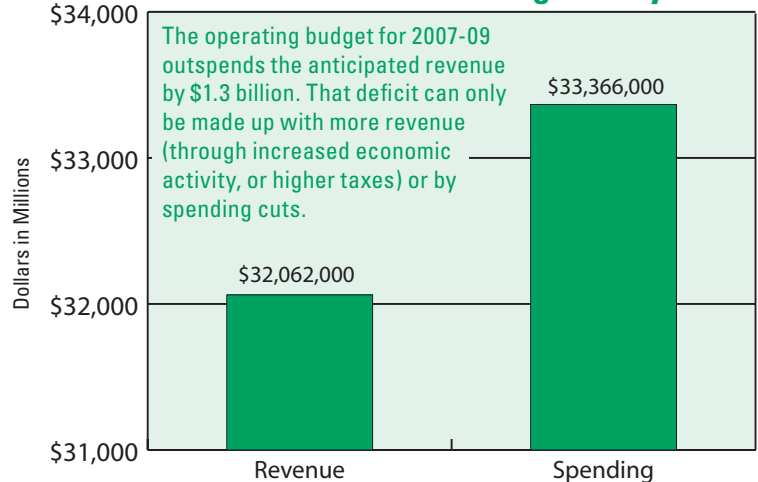
Legislature approves a generous but *risky* spending plan

Revenue collections from taxes and other sources are estimated to run \$2.2 billion higher than originally expected — due mostly to the housing boom in many parts of our state. Our priority was to adopt a sustainable budget, which would treat this huge surplus as “one time” money and match spending to a revenue level that we believe can be sustained by the economy.

We were disappointed that the budget approved by the Legislature did not follow these principles, and instead increases spending by 15 percent while revenues are only expected to grow at half that rate. In fact, the governor’s own budget office has predicted the \$33.4 billion budget will create a \$1.2 billion deficit in just a few years.

While we don’t disagree that the budget attempts to fund many good things, it will likely place Washington families and businesses in a difficult position down the road. If revenue growth cools as expected, it could force the Legislature to cut programs or raise taxes — options we don’t support. Perhaps the only bright spot that pertains to the budget is the passage of a resolution for the November ballot that would create a constitutionally protected budget stabilization – or “rainy day” – fund. If voters approve it, the state would be required each year to put 1 percent of state revenue into an account that could be tapped only with legislative consent either for declared emergencies or in case of an economic downturn.

What makes the new budget risky?



Helping the agricultural industry to thrive

Agriculture is the number-one employer in Washington. Agricultural issues are important not only to the communities in our district but to the success of our state as a whole.

We introduced measures in both the House and Senate to set a business and occupation (B&O) tax rate for custom farming services. While these particular bills did not make it through the process, House Bill 2352 did, and it accomplishes the same objective. Also passing the



Legislature was House Bill 1902 (co-sponsored by Rep. Newhouse), which provides a sales and use tax exemption for farm equipment repairs, and another bill we supported: SB 5009, which exempts biodiesel fuel used for non-highway farm use from sales and use tax.

Finally, we worked together to pass House Bill 1648, which does the same thing as Sen. Honeyford’s Right to Farm legislation (Senate Bill 5076). Entitled the “Farmer Protection Act,” it will help protect a farmer’s right to change what he or she decides to farm without threat of a lawsuit.





Major changes in children's education

The Legislature approved significant changes in our children's education that parents should note.

So many 10th graders failed to pass the math portion of the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) that the

Legislature decided to delay the math requirement until 2013.

In addition, the passage of Senate Bill 5297 will significantly change how our public schools approach sex education. Schools that choose to continue offering sex education will be required to meet standards outlined by the state Department of Health. We voted against this measure because it takes away control from parents and local school boards and allows no flexibility for schools that prefer abstinence-only sex education. Also, it makes no sense to create a statewide curriculum for sex education without requiring the same for subjects like math or science.

Building safe communities

We helped pass legislation (Senate Bill 5987) that represents a modest first step toward confronting increased criminal gang activity. Another significant measure is House Bill 1001, which will create tougher penalties for car thieves. It allows for a coordinated tracking system of arrested car thieves who travel from county to county. HB 1001 also includes harsher penalties for juveniles, who will see meaningful punishment for their third auto theft conviction, instead of their seventh conviction, as the law had allowed.

Concerns about other legislation proposed or passed

The Legislature took a serious step backward on welfare reform this session by passing Senate Bill 6016. This bill undermines the state's WorkFirst program, which has demonstrated for the past 10 years that welfare-to-work can help families become self-sufficient. We're also concerned that the passage of Senate Bill 5659 will prolong the cycle of dependency. It creates a new state-run "family leave" benefit starting in 2009 but does not specify how that benefit will be funded. A payroll tax on workers was proposed but removed from the bill before it passed in the final days of the session.

While the **Legislature was extending new benefits to certain groups, it was eliminating benefits committed to public employees.** House Bill 2391 does away with the "gain sharing" that became part of certain public pension plans in 1998. Legislation to uphold the state's promise was rejected.

Bills to fund statewide political campaigns with taxpayer money, put restrictions on qualifying initiatives for the ballot and allow voter registration up to and on Election Day failed to become law. However, House Bill 2079 was passed, repealing an important provision of the 1992 campaign-reform law passed by 70 percent of voters. This bill repeals limits on how labor organizations may influence an election or bankroll a political committee. Also, numerous proposals were introduced that would have compromised our election laws.

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